

Native Plant Gardening

In San Francisco

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Celebrate the natural
splendor of the Bay Area
by growing native plants in
your own yard. You can have
year-round beauty, save water
and work, and provide vital
food and shelter for local
birds and butterflies.

Produced by the
San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners
and the San Francisco Water Department

- PUC

Grow Native Plants

You'll be helping to preserve the Bay Area environment we all love so much. And native plants have a lot to offer—fragrant flowers and friendly foliage, a home for birds and butterflies, low-maintenance garden magic and low-cost garden care.

Feed birds and butterflies

Native plants help feed and house birds, butterflies and beneficial insects and help make your garden a place of natural wonder.

Work less, water less

Most local natives thrive in poor soil and resist pests naturally. And drought-tolerant native plants rarely even need watering after their first full winter.

Get great colors

Spring wildflowers burst with color. Native perennials and shrubs can bloom spring through autumn. Foliage varies from showy silver to deep green.

Give back to the earth

You can help restore the environment and wildlife habitats that have been destroyed by development and by the spread of invasive weeds. Just grow native plants!

It's Easy!

Prepare Your Site

Be sure to clear your site of weeds before planting. Then learn to recognize the young weeds and always pull them as soon as possible. The less you disturb your soil, the fewer weed seeds will sprout.

Amazingly—and unlike almost any other garden situation—you rarely need to amend or fertilize your soil to grow the native plants listed in this brochure! Unless noted in the list, these plants will thrive in San Francisco's clay, sand, and fill soils. In fact, we have found that the plants listed here do much better in poor soil than in rich, loamy soil.

If your site has poor drainage (heavy clay soil and flat ground), in most cases all you need to do is create a mound or raised bed with the existing soil. If you need more, get topsoil with a real soil base (not a



potting mix, which is mostly ground wood products with a little sand).

To prevent problems from overwatering, always group native plants in an area away from plants that require summer watering. This also allows you to amend and fertilize your other planted areas for water savings and healthy growth.

Plant in the Fall

The best time to plant or sow natives is in autumn when the rains come. If for some reason you must plant in spring or summer, your plants will have a difficult time getting established. In this case be sure to plant on a cool day, provide temporary shade during hot spells, and water every 1 to 3 weeks until the rains come.

From seed . . .

Sow seeds of all annuals, lupines and California poppies directly in the soil one inch or less deep. Be sure to tamp the soil down gently after planting to remove any air pockets. Most native seeds take about 30 days to germinate. Always mark plantings and young plants with stakes or labels so you don't confuse them with look-alike weeds.

From starts . . .

When planting potted natives, first loosen the root ball to release the roots so they can grow out into the soil. Then make sure the crown (where the roots meet the stem) is slightly above the soil level. Tamp the soil down firmly after planting to remove air pockets.

Mulch Carefully

A 3" to 4" layer of organic mulch like woodchips or leaves keeps weeds down on bare soil between plantings or on paths. But be sure not to pile mulch against the stem—this may cause crown rot and kill your plants. Also avoid mulching thickly (no more than 1/2") around wildflowers if you want them to reseed themselves.

Avoid Summer Watering!

It may be hard to believe, but drought-tolerant natives need summer rest. After their first full winter, they should only be watered in late spring or early autumn if the rains fail. Summer watering usually shortens the life of your plants and can cause problems like root rot, weeds and snails. But if for some reason you must plant in spring or summer, water every 1 to 3 weeks until the rains come. Even without water, most of the plants listed inside stay green or flower all summer long!



Control Slugs and Snails

Native seedlings need protection! Copper foil barriers and hand picking are the best nontoxic methods for controlling snails and slugs.

Easy-to-Grow Native Plants for San Francisco*

For the best native-plant-gardening success, SLUG recommends the following plants selected by native-plant expert and local landscaper Fred Rinne.

Annual wildflowers

These live for one season then reseed themselves. Plant from seed among perennials and shrubs for year-round interest. Once the seeds drop after blooming, you can trim them to the ground for neatness, but it is best to leave the dry plants for birds and beneficial insects.

<i>Clarkia</i> species, farewell-to-spring	Large, fragrant pink flowers in late spring; FS-PSH
<i>Claytonia perfoliata</i> , miners' lettuce	Succulent, edible leaves in early spring; FS-FSH (persists longer in shade)
<i>Lasthenia californica</i> , goldfields	Tiny, bright golden flowers form masses of color in spring; 2" tall; great for flat areas with clay soil; FS
<i>Lupinus nanus</i> , sky lupine	Blue and white flowers in spring; to 1' tall; forms beautiful mounds of color on dry hillsides; FS, DRN
<i>Phacelia distans</i> , white phacelia	Tufted white flowers in spring; feathery, gray leaves; hugs the ground; FS-PSH
<i>Oenothera contorta</i> , frankie evening primrose	Bright yellow flowers in spring; forms a delicate mat of tiny leaves; thrives in sloping, sandy soil; FS

Perennial wildflowers

Many of these bloom longer into summer than the annual wildflowers above and keep their attractive foliage year-round. They can live for many years.

<i>Achillea millefolium</i> , yarrow	White flowers spring to summer on stalks to 1' tall; groundcover with feathery leaves; important for butterflies, beneficial insects; FS-PSH
<i>Anaphalis margaritacea</i> , pearly everlasting	White globe-shaped flowers in summer; silvery gray leaves; 1' tall; FS
<i>Armeria maritima</i> , sea pink	Pink globe-shaped flowers in spring; low-growing round clumps of grass-like leaves; FS, DRN
<i>Aster chilensis</i> , California aster	Lavender and gold blooms summer to fall; slender branches 2' to 3' tall; spreads by shoots; great for dry slopes; FS, DRN
<i>Erigeron glaucus</i> , seaside daisy	Light-purple, daisy-like flowers with yellow centers through spring; low-growing with long, bluish leaves; wind-tolerant; FS
<i>Eschscholzia californica</i> , California poppy	Orange-centered flowers with golden yellow tips spring to fall; local form is perennial; FS
<i>Grindelia</i> species, gum plant	Bright yellow flowers late spring to autumn; to 3' tall; extremely tough and wind resistant; FS, DRN
<i>Iris douglasiana</i> , Douglas iris	Large purple flowers in spring; deep green, curving leaf blades; very adaptable; FS-FSH
<i>Lupinus albilfrons</i> , silvery lupine	Purple flowers in spring; low mounds with silvery leaves; native to foggy hilltops; food plant of the endangered Mission Blue butterfly; FS, DRN
<i>Oenothera elata hookeri</i> , Hooker's evening primrose	Bright yellow flowers spring to summer; tall, striking plant to 6'; FS
<i>Sisyrinchium bellum</i> , blue-eyed grass	Tiny blue flowers in spring; under 1' tall; leaf blades like a small iris; FS-PSH

Perennial grasses

These are the foundation of our coastal prairie. With striking shapes and textures, they complement wildflowers and are easier to maintain than most exotic grasses.

<i>Calamagrostis nutkaensis</i> , Nootka reedgrass	Large spiky bunches 2' to 3' tall; best in cool areas like the foggy summit of Twin Peaks where it grows naturally; PSH-FS
<i>Elymus glaucus</i> , blue wildrye	Tall, bluish grass to 3'; grows taller on flat sites, shorter on dry slopes; almost bamboo-like in appearance, but noninvasive; FS
<i>Festuca californica</i> , California fescue	Light blue-green grass forming beautiful, large clumps 1' to 2' tall; lives on cool hilltops; excellent for dry shade; FS-PSH, DRN
<i>Festuca idahoensis</i> and <i>F. rubra</i> , Idaho fescue and red fescue	Dark green, fine-textured grasses forming soft clumps to 1' tall; <i>F. rubra</i> spreads by rhizomes; FS-PSH
<i>Leymus triticoides</i> , creeping wildrye (formerly <i>Elymus</i>)	Dark green groundcover under 1' tall; spreads by runners; excellent for erosion control; FS
<i>Nassella pulchra</i> , purple needlegrass	Purple seedheads on tall stalks; forms clumps to 1' tall; a classic specimen of our coastal prairie; very adaptable; noninvasive; FS



Short, Showy Shrubs

Short, Showy Shrubs

These are the local heroes of our native ecosystem—providing food and shelter for local birds and butterflies and flowers and foliage for your garden. They are extremely drought- and wind-resistant plants under 3' tall.

<i>Arctostaphylos hookeri franciscana</i> , Franciscan manzanita	Silvery leaves; grows low to the ground, forming a good groundcover; FS, DRN
<i>Baccharis pilularis</i> 'Twin Peaks' dwarf coyote bush	Dark green, fine-textured leaves with a flowing, windswept shape; tiny flowers in late summer important to wildlife; extremely drought- and wind-tolerant; FS, DRN
<i>Epilobium cana</i> , (formerly <i>Zauschneria</i>), California hummingbird fuchsia	Bright red blooms late spring to summer; to 1' tall; native to areas inland of San Francisco; FS
<i>Eriogonum latifolium</i> , buckwheat	Pink, puffball flowers in spring or summer; rounded, leathery leaves; a tough hillside plant vital to many native insects; FS, DRN
<i>Eriophyllum staechadifolium</i> , lizardtail	Bright yellow flowers summer to fall; silver jagged leaves on a dense shrub to 3' tall; extremely wind-tolerant; FS-PSH, DRN
<i>Lupinus arboreus</i> , bush lupine	Large spikes of yellow flowers in summer; 2' to 4' tall; our giant lupine; short lived (2 years); FS, DRN
<i>Lupinus variicolor</i> , varied lupine	Purple and white, spectacular flowers in spring; low-growing form; lives on exposed rocky sites; FS, DRN
<i>Mimulus aurantiacus</i> , bush monkeyflower	Pale yellow-orange, tubular flowers spring to summer; dark green leaves with a resinous coating; to 3' tall; FS-PSH



Medium-sized shrubs

These shrubs are 3' to 10' tall and are great accent plants and screens for smaller gardens. They provide beautiful habitats for birds and butterflies.

<i>Ceanothus thyrsiflorus</i> , blueblossom	Spectacular blue blossoms in spring; deep green leaves on a low-growing shrub; many forms are available; FS, DRN
<i>Garrya elliptica</i> , coast siltassel	Long, hanging, tassel flowers in January; silvery gray, wavy leaves; to 10'; FS-PSH
<i>Oemleria cerasiformis</i> , osoberry (syn. <i>Osmaronia</i>)	White blooms in spring; 3' to 5' tall; winter deciduous (loses leaves in winter); native to exposed hillsides; berries edible to wildlife; FS, DRN
<i>Rhamnus californica</i> , coffeeberry	Dark berries popular with wildlife; usually 3' to 10' tall; a rugged shrub; FS, DRN
<i>Ribes sanguineum</i> var. <i>glutinosum</i> flowering currant	Masses of pink flowers in early spring; soft, light green leaves on attractive woodland shrub; summer deciduous (loses leaves during dry summers); FS-PSH

Trees and large shrubs

For shade, screens and natural food for wildlife, these trees and shrubs can't be beat. They grow to ten feet and over.

<i>Heteromeles arbutifolia</i> , toyon	Red berries in winter popular with birds; a dense shrub 10' and taller; adapts to a wide range of habitats; FS, DRN
<i>Myrica californica</i> , wax myrtle	Dark green leaves and waxy berries edible to birds; dense and rounded form 10' and taller; excellent windscreen and bird habitat; FS
<i>Prunus ilicifolia</i> , holly-leaf cherry or islay	Holly-like, delicate leaves; a dense shrub 10' to 15' tall; fruit edible to wildlife; excellent as a hedge or screen; FS

Vines

These vines are excellent for climbing fences, arbors and trellises or for use as groundcovers.

<i>Aristolochia californica</i> , pipevine	Light green, felt-like leaves and pipe-like flowers in spring; a curious vine that can be both groundcover or climber; PSH, DRN
<i>Calystegia purpurata</i> , coast morning glory	White-pink flowers spring to summer with triangular leaves; great for climbing chain-link fences or cascading down embankments; FS-PSH
<i>Lonicera hispidula</i> , California honeysuckle	Classic honeysuckle flowers spring to summer without the invasiveness of commercial honeysuckles; FS-PSH

FS = full sun, **FSH** = full shade, **PSH** = part shade, **DRN** = good drainage is critical for that plant—it does best on sloping ground

* Listed by genus, species, variety and common name

"Native" Plants?

Native plants have evolved with the landscape and all its inhabitants over millions of years. After so many years of natural selection, they have adapted to the climate, soil and wildlife where they grow. A "California native" plant from even 20 miles away may not be well adapted to the local conditions.

Hence, the best native plants for gardens on the San Francisco peninsula are "local native" plants—plants grown from locally collected stock. These plants also provide the special food and shelter to which local wildlife are adapted.

If you live within 1 to 2 blocks of a natural open space, it is very important to plant local native plants as a rule of thumb. This is because cross-pollination with nonlocal California native plants may weaken the nearby wild populations' ability to deal with their unique environment. Some nonlocal native plants, however, pose no real threats—call SLUG or the California Native Plant Society for more information.

If you live two city blocks or more from a natural open space, your plant selections are less critical. Just remember—the more local the better.



Where to Find "Local Native" Plants and Seeds

A few groups in San Francisco offer local native plants (plants grown from locally collected stock) at regular plant sales. These are listed at right. Many nurseries carry California native plants but, at this time, few local natives. We hope this will change soon! For up-to-date information on plant and seed sources, call the California Native Plant Society, Strybing Arboretum, or SLUG.

More Information

Local groups, gardens and plant sales in San Francisco

California Native Plant Society, local chapter, plant sales, programs, work parties, newsletter, (415) 731-3028
Golden Gate National Parks, habitat-restoration volunteer programs, (415) 673-4067, ext. 29

SLUG's Garden for the Environment, open daily, dawn to dusk, 7th Ave. and Lawton, (415) 285-SLUG

Strybing Arboretum Botanical Gardens & Library, plant sales, demonstration gardens, programs, Golden Gate Park, 9th Ave. and Lincoln Way, (415) 661-1514

Twin Peaks Native Plants Garden, S.F. Rec. & Park, Twin Peaks Blvd. 1/8 mile south of the overlook, (415) 666-7200

Free brochures

For general water conservation brochures, call the S.F. Water Department at 923-2662. For other water-wise gardening brochures, call SLUG at 285-7584.

More publications

Complete Guide to Native Perennials of California, 1994
& *Complete Guide to Native Shrubs of California*, 1995, Glenn Keator, Chronicle Books, SF, CA

Fremontia, journal of the California Native Plant Society, Sacramento, CA, (916) 447-2677

Growing California Native Plants, 1980, Marjorie G. Schmidt, UC Press, Berkeley, CA

Growing Natives, newsletter of Growing Native Research Institute, Berkeley, CA, (510) 232-9865

Yerba Buena News, California Native Plant Society, San Francisco, CA, (415) 221-6799



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